'PERIPHERAL' CULTURE IN THE METROPOLIS: WEST INDIANS IN NEW YORK CITY

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Migration movements have been an inherent element of Caribbean life for at least 500 years.[1] In a way, the societies of the Caribbean are themselves the product of migration movements. These migration movements began with the so-called "discovery" and settlement by European seafarers. They continued with the forced and brutal resettlement and enslavement of African peoples as labor force for the colonial plantation economies in the "New World" and, after the abolition of slavery, the migration within the Caribbean region and to the Central American isthmus; and they have culminated in the massive emigration to the industrial metropoles after World War II – first to the United Kingdom and, since the late sixties, increasingly to the United States and Canada.[2] This long- standing tradition of migration movements to and from the

[1]The term "West Indian" refers to the inhabitants of the English-speaking Caribbean islands, the mainland territories of Guyana and Belize, as well as the English-speaking Afro-creole enclaves en the predominantly Hispanic Caribbean countries along the East coast of Central America. The term "Afro-Caribbean" refers to the Anglophone, Francophone and Dutch-speaking (i.e. the "non-Hispanic") regions of the Caribbean. The "Afro-Caribbean" societies share certain similarities which distinguish them from the "Hispanic Caribbean": the historically perpetual dominance of a plantation economy, a population overwhelmingly of African descent (with the exceptions of Guyana and Trinidad), and an Afro-creolized folk culture distinct and separated from that of the Euro-creole dominant classes. The "Hispanic Caribbean", on the other hand, has been historically characterized by a more diversified settler economy onto which plantation slavery was later imposed; a greater mixing of peoples of Indian, African, and Spanish descent; and a more unified syncretized culture which is dominated by the Spanish tradition, into which, nenevertheless, African and Amerindian heritages have been synthesized (SUTTON 1987:16; HOETINK 1985). Since the number of immigrants from the Dutch-speaking and Francophone Caribbean in New York City, except for those from Haiti, is negligible, the Afro-Caribbean population of New York City consists essentially of immigrants from the Anglophone Caribbean and from Haiti. The following analysis refers, strictly speaking, to "West Indians" in New York City, that is migrants from the Anglophone Caribbean or what is known as the Commonwealth Caribbean. To a large degree, however, it is also valid for Haitian immigrants – thus the frequent use of the term "Afro-Caribbean".

[2]See MARSHALL 1987; PEACH 1986; BRYCE-LAPORTE 1972.

Caribbean region has been closely related to what the well-known Caribbean Political Scientist and Social Historian Gordon Lewis has called the "tenth commandment" for understanding the ethnic and colonial heritage of the Caribbean: "Caribbean peoples have always been, and still are, a massively uprooted people".[3]

Since the turn of the century, New York City, the immigrant city par excellence and the target of millions of (mostly European) immigrants in the past, has also become become "the promised land" for a growing number of immigrants from the Caribbean. According to the census, the foreign-born Black population in New York, of which the overwhelming majority had come from the Anglophone Caribbean, increased from 3,552 in 1900, to 12,581 in 1910, to 36,613 in 1920; in 1930 it was almost 58,000 or 25 per cent of Harlem's population.[4] Although the early migrants quicky became aware of American racism and of the fact that 'gold did not lay around in the streets' and also brought this to the attention of West Indians at home, New York City remained "the leading target and entrepot for Caribbean peoples to the United States";[5] it continued to be the symbol of opportunity, of fulfillment of the the immigrants' dreams, and of their determination to better themselves economically. "Everybody wanted to get to New York", wrote a West-Indian immigrant in the 1930s.[6] Or, as the Caribbean-American novelist Paule Marshall has so eloquently expressed it: "Like a dark sea nudging its way onto a white beach and staining the sand, they came."[7] However, it was not until the passing of the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 that Caribbean migration turned literally into a mass movement exceeding that of the previous 70 years and growing ever since.[8] More than half of all Caribbean immigrants and more than 70 per cent of all West Indian immigrants have settled in New York City. According to the 1980 census, there have been about 300,000 Afro-Caribbean immigrants in New York – more than four fifth of whom arrived after 1965.[9] Presently, the city has well over a million

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[3]Quoted from BACH p. 7; see also LEWIS 1983:2-18.

[4]U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS 1918:62; 1935:17; see also the pioneering study on West Indian immigration to the United States of Ira Augustine de REID 1939. The actual number of West Indians in New York was certainly higher for there has been evidence that "illegal" immigration was common at that time (cf. C.L.R. JAMES, *Minty Alley* (1936); Paule MARSHALL, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959).

[5]BRYCE-LAPORTE 1979:215.

[6]Quoted form Calvin HOLDER 1987:9.

[7]MARSHALL 1959:4.

[8]VAN CAPELLEVEEN 1987; 1989; see also REIMERS 1985.

[9]U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS 1983:34-9, 34-14; NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING 1985:1- 3; CARIBBEAN / AMERICAN MEDIA STUDIES (CAMS) 1986: vol. II, 15; see also Ellen Percy KRALY 1987.

Afro-Caribbean inhabitants including U.S.-born children of immigrants and so-called "illegals". New York City has become the city with the largest number of Afro-Caribbeans in the whole world, so to speak the metropolitan branch of the Caribbean archipelago.

The "Caribbeanization" of New York City

Whereas the early immigrants from the West Indies settled and merged with the 'native' Afro-American communities of Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, the new Afro-Caribbean immigrants have primarily moved to neighborhoods in central Brooklyn (Crown Heights, East Flatbush, Flatbush) – and, to a lesser degree, in Southeast Queens (St.Albans, Cambria Heights, Springfield Gardens, Laurelton) – which experienced a substantial white flight during the 1970s. Because of the prevalence of small one– or two-family houses and corresponding high rates of owner occupancy, these neighborhoods did not suffer the kind of deterioration and destruction that followed the white exodus, for example, in the South Bronx. Moreover, the (until the mid 1970s) relative low cost of these houses and the legendary West Indian zest "to buy house"[10] contributed not only to the maintenance and preservation of neighborhoods which would otherwise have deteriorated but also to an open demonstration of and pride in the "West Indianess" of the community.

Interestingly, the new West Indian immigrants have not separated from each other according to national or insular origin.[11] They just moved away, wherever possible, from Latinos and Black U.S.–Americans; as well as from white New Yorkers, which, of course, has been due less to subjective preferences but to the widespread existence of white racism.[12]

The massive presence of the new Afro-Caribbean immigrants has lead to what has been dubbed "Caribbeanization" of New York City. This "Caribbeanization" has shown, on the one hand, in the recent transformation of the metropolitan economy.[13] On the other, it has been expressed in an infusion of Caribbean life styles and culture into the social fabric of the city. Caribbean neighborhoods have offered to the newcomer not only protection and support and a piece of home 'far from home' but they have

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[10]See Paule MARSHALL, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, op. cit.

[11]The history of colonialism has lead to a specific fragmentation of the Caribbean region and produced the well–known trait of "insularity" which is still part of Caribbean consciousness today (see LOWENTHAL 1984; MOYA-PONS 1979.

[12]For the fundamental role of white racism and 'white supremacy' in American society see VAN CAPELLEVEEN 1988; 1991.

[13]See VAN CAPELLEVEEN 1990, particularly chap. 6; 1987: 262-268.

increasingly developed into the center of an international Afro-Caribbean culture. Neighborhood institutions such as churches, schools, and day cares, as well as street corners (as informal meeting places) have taken on decidedly Afro-Caribbean characteristics. West Indian and Haitian groceries, bakeries, and restaurants, which exclusively sell food and meals from the Caribbean, barber shops and beauty salons as places of social gatherings, record stores with their calypso, soca, and reggae sounds, and, most of all, the presence of Afro-Caribbean people in the streets, including the obligatory Rastas and domino players, have created an atmosphere that has turned central Brooklyn, perceptibly by the senses, into the 'periphery within the metropole'. As the already quoted West Indian-American novelist Paule Marshall has so vividly described it:

> Whenever I [...] walk along Fulton Street or Nostrand Avenue, [...] I have to remind myself that I'm in Brooklyn and not in the middle of a teeming outdoor market in St. George's, Grenada, or Kingston, Jamaica, or on some other West Indian island. Because there, suddenly, are all the sights and sounds, colors, smells, and textures of the entire Caribbean archipelago, transplanted intact to the sidewalks of New York.[14]

This "Caribbeanization" of New York City can also be seen in the sphere of music, theatre and intellectual life. Institutions such as the Caribbean Cultural Center, the Caribbean Research Center at Medgar Evers College, or the C.U.N.Y. Asociation of Caribbean Studies and its (1985 published) journal *Cimarron* tell of the enormous expansion of artistic and scholarly interest in the Caribbean.

Another sign of this "Caribbeanization" is the development of a West Indian community press in New York City. The weekly newspaper *New York Carib News* and the monthly magazine *Everybody's,* for example, report in great detail about events in the Caribbean as well as events and problems in New York City which are relevant to the Afro-Caribbean community. Performing as the "voice of the Caribbean-American community" they are widely circulated and read by many of the immigrants. Even newspapers that serve the Afro-American community as a whole, such as the *Daily Challenge,* have given prominent space to Caribbean news and have not tried to hide the West Indian background of its editors.[15] Moreover, there are at least three radio stations (WLIB-AM 1190, WNYE-FM/Medgar Evers College 91.5, WNWK-FM 105.9) which

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[14]MARSHALL 1985:67.

[15]In the 1930s, West Indian immigrants owned most of the Afro-American press, notably the leading Black weekly in New York City, the *New York Amsterdam News.* However, this could not be discovered by reading any of these newspapers. Correspondingly, there has never been a succesful explicitly ethnic West Indian community newspaper in the past (KASINITZ 1987:52-53).

feature, particularly on the weekends, exclusively West Indian music and informations.

Immigrants from the entire Anglophone Caribbean as well as from Haiti live in the same neighborhoods and interact and communicate in their daily lives. As a result, the migration experience has strengthened a collective West Indian and Afro-Caribbean ethnicity and culture; and not the recourse to national and insular origin. People who had little contact with each other before migrating to New York have been (and still are) brought together spacially and socially in New York City developing an Afro-Caribbean collective identity. It is the migration process and the concentration of people from different Caribbean countries in New York City that have generated a comprehensive West Indian or Afro-Caribbean ethnicity and culture, a comprehensive Afro-Caribbean consciousness, which has overcome, to a large degree, the traditional insular and national barriers. The West Indian Federation might have failed in the Caribbean; it has been increasingly succesful in New York City.[16]

The West Indian Carnival in Brooklyn

The existence and importance of such an international Afro-Caribbean ethnicity and culture has been most clearly demonstrated in *the* Afro-Caribbean event in New York, the West Indian Carnival which takes place every year during and before the Labor Day weekend in Brooklyn. Almost completely ignored by non-Caribbean New Yorkers and the non-Caribbean press, the "West Indian American Day Carnival" (as it is officially called) features several nights of concerts, steel band and calypso contests, and children's pageants on the grounds of the Brooklyn Museum, culminating on Labor Day in a massive street procession on Eastern Parkway with tens of thousands of masqueraders and musicians and hundreds of thousands – during the last years more than a million – of reveling and participating spectators. These 'official' events are accompanied by dozens of commercially and privately organized shows, dances, festivities, and parties in West Indian neighborhoods around the city. During Labor Day weekend the West Indian population of Brooklyn doubles. West Indians have been coming from near New York suburbs and neighboring New Jersey and from as far as Florida or California, from all parts of Canada, and even from the Caribbean and England to spend the West Indian Carnival with relatives and friends in Brooklyn.

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[16]VAN CAPELLEVEEN 1990; KASINITZ 1988; see also LEWIS 1982. Moreover, the new forms of Afro-Caribbean consciousness have been relayed back to the Caribbean (SUTTON / MAKIESKY 1987:106-112).

The West Indian Carnival in New York City dates back to the 1920s when 'homesick' Trinidadian an Eastern Caribbean immigrants organized masquerades, steelband and calypso contests in large ballrooms in Harlem such as the Rennaissance and the St. Nicholas Arena. As in the Caribbean, Carnival was celebrated in the middle of winter, on the weekend preceding Ash Wednesday. When the crowds started to regularly outdo the indoor facilities, the time had come to move Carnival outdoors. In 1947, the first street Carnival was held on Seventh Avenue in the heart of Black Harlem and, because of the cold winter weather in New York, moved to Labor Day at the beginning of September. The Harlem street Carnival was celebrated every year until it was prohibited in 1964 after some "disturbances" occured during the parade. Because the majority of West Indian immigrants began to settle in Brooklyn in the mid and late 1960s, Carnival was moved to the borough by Rufus Gorin, a Trinidad-born band leader and die-hard "mas man".[17] Due to its bad reputation following the "disturbances" in the past, Carnival was held for several years in small side streets as block parties. In 1969, Gorin's successor, Carlos Lezama, who still organizes today's Carnival, obtained an official permission from the city to celebrate Carnival on Eastern Parkway, a wide boulevard that runs through the center of Brooklyn's Afro-American neighborhoods. Despite repeated "disturbances" and "outbreaks of violence" as well as several attempts to give Carnival more "respectability" and "professionality" by moving it to Fifth Avenue in Manhatta,[18] the West Indian Carnival continued to be held in Brooklyn and developed into the largest ethnic and cultural spectacle in North America.[19]

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[17] "Mas" is the West Indian term for masquerade or costumed revelers. "Playing mas" means to participate in a "mas band". See also footnote 20.

[18] In 1982, for example, an attempt to mount a more "respectable" and "professional" Carnival in Manhattan by a group of West Indian businessmen failed badly (see HALL 1982).

[19] There are several other West Indian Carnival festivals celebrated by West Indian communities in the diaspora: the Notting Hill Carnival in London which is known for its notorious "rioting" and political conflicts expressing the grievances of Britain's Black population with white British society; the Boston Carnival refered to as "the one before the big one" (because it is held a few weeks before the Brooklyn Carnival); the Hartfort Carnival held at the end of "West Indian Week in Hartfort", Connecticut – "a typical small town American parade" and thus rather different from most other West Indian Carnivals (HILL 1978:16); the Montreal Carnival which is held at the end of June and, for many West Indian immigrants in the United States and Canada, marks the start of the summer festival season; and the Toronto Carnival which is better known as "Caribana" and has drawn up to 500,000 spectators in 1985. Other attempts to organize a West Indian Carnival have been made in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Miami, and Baltimore. None of these 'exiled' Carnivals, however, has reached the scale

The most important components of Brooklyn Carnival – calypso music, steel bands, and mas bands, as well individual masquerades – have come out of the Carnival tradition in Trinidad.[20] Although the Brooklyn Carnival is still Trinidadian in its principal form, music and masquerades have changed over time. On the one hand, non-Trinidadian elements have increased; today not only calypso and soca is played – often from powerful sound systems mounted on trucks – but more and more ska and reggae from Jamaica, spouge from Barbados, and merengue from Haiti. On the other, traditional masquerade performances consisting of small groups and individuals have been replaced by large mas bands and more current performances, although in Brooklyn one can still see traditional masquerades such as the "Jab Molassi" or the "Moco Jumbie". These changes substantiate the "Caribbeanization" of the Brooklyn Carnival. Though still Trinidadian in form and organization, the Brooklyn Carnival has developed into a genuinely Pan-West Indian and Afro-Caribbean event subtly transforming traditional allegiances to specific islands and home countries into a new feeling of West Indian collectivity and solidarity. As the anthropologists Donald Hill and Robert Abramson have noted:

> Transplanted to Brooklyn, the great variety of dances seen in island performances has dwindled to two or three steps suitable for moving up Eastern Parkway in huge crowds. In New York City, the local villager has a new identity: he or she is not just an islander but a West Indian (Hill/Abramson 1979:83).

This new feeling of "West Indianness" has also been expressed in a 1976 calypso ("Mas in Brooklyn") by the Mighty Sparrow:

> You could be from St. Cleo or Jun Jun
> In New York all that done
> They haven't know who is who
> New York equalize you
> Bajan, Grenadian, Jamaican, tut mun [everybody]
> Drinking they rum

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and importance of the Brooklyn Labor Day Carnival which has regularly drawn more than a million spectators in the 1980s.

[20] A "mas band" (masquerade band) consists of a "King" and a "Queen" in highly sophisticated costumes, several other important characters (section leaders), and a larger number (sometimes several hundreds) of revelers in less elaborated costumes. All costumes of a mas band are carefully designed around a Carnival theme and fabricated in the month ahead of Carnival in the so-called "mas camps". Individual traditional masqueraders are, for example, the "Jab Molassi" (devil man) or the "Moco Jumbie" (stilt dancer). For the 'original' West Indian Carnival in Trinidad, see Ruth WÜST 1987, HILL 1985.

Beating they bottle and spoon
Nobody could watch me and honestly say
They don't like to be in Brooklyn on Labor Day
(*ibid.*, p.73).

The traditional Carnival's motto "all o' we is one", symbolizing the reversal and equalization of social hierarchies and differences, has taken on the new meaning of equalizing different national and insular origins. Instead of flags and symbols of national identity, the Brooklyn Carnival has displayed masquerades and costumes which have been turned into symbols of West Indian unity.[21]

As distinct from most other ethnic street festivals in the United States – even the other "Caribbean" event in New York City, the Puerto Rican Parade – the West Indian Carnival has lacked a centralized structure and leadership. "As a dramatic event, Carnival is strikingly leaderless", writes the New York sociologist Philip Kasinitz. "There are themes, a certain ebb and flow to the activity, but no particular center or head" (*ibid.*, p. 341). The official organizing committee, the West Indian American Day Carnival Association (WIADCA), does secure the permission for the Labor Day procession on Eastern Parkway and makes sure that the various conditions are met (e.g. sufficiant sanitary facilities). WIADCA also organizes the 'official' events such as the "Panorama Eliminations", the "Clash of the Calypso Giants", the "Reggae Night", and the "Kiddie's Carnival" on the Brooklyn Museum grounds.[22] The organization of the steel bands and mas bands, the endless rehersals in the mas camps, as well as the design and fabrication of the costumes, on the other hand, have all remained relatively uncoordinated and totally independent from the official organizers. At times there have been tensions between band leaders and WIADCA officials adding to the 'spontaneity' of the festival. However, the lack of a centralized structure and leadership has been particularly evident in the Carnival procession on Eastern Parkway itself.

The procession starts with the organizers of WIADCA, various dignataries, and the Grand Marshalls, mostly businessmen, politicians, or other community 'notabilities' marching down the Parkway. Nobody pays any attention to them; most people are not even aware of their presence. At this stage, the main 'action' is going on at the sidelines. There one meets friends and relatives from home or from other parts of the West Indian diaspora, eats curried goat, meat patties, or roti, drinks beer and rum punch, dances to the music from the sound systems which have been

[21] KASINITZ/FREIDENBERG-HERBSTEIN 1987:343.

[22] These have been, for example, the official Carnival events in 1984. They are held, more or less the same, every year. "Panorama" means a steelband competition.

installed everywhere, or simple browses through the displays of countless vendors. The sidelines of the entire Parkway have turned into a gigantic fleamarket where one can buy almost everything from straw hats made in the West Indies to the collected speeches of Maurice Bishop as well as delicacies from the entire Caribbean cuisine. With a delay of about half an hour the 'second act' begins: Cadillacs convertibles with the winners of a West Indian beauty contest, clothed in bathing suits, drive slowly down the Parkway. Like the dignitaries before, these young women, although a more delightful sight, are peripheral to the Carnival.

Then it takes another one or two hours, sometimes even longer, until the 'real' Carnival procession begins – with the brass and steel bands, the pretty and colorful mas bands, the devil-men and stilt- dancers, and the floats with the blasting sound systems. Even now, spectators are not behaving like regular spectators. Instead, they are intervening actively into the Carnival festival, "road march" (parade), "jump up" (dance), and "play mas" themselves and merge with the steel and mas bands, which, surrounded by a huge dancing and reveling mass of people, are hardly able to move down the Parkway. Sometimes they take spontaneously to the side streets where they mix again with reveling spectators. In addition, the devil-men, bands of nearly naked men, their bodies blackened, wearing devil horns and tails, generally move against the flow of the parade trying to scare spectators by taking their clothes and smearing them.

Usually, only some bands and floats eventually reach the reviewing stand at the Brooklyn Museum, where the organizers and dignitaries have been waiting in vain to inspect the Carnival parade which never made it down to the reviewing stand. However, nobody seems to mind. Only the organizers, the dignitaries, and the press have regularly complained about the "chaos" and the "disgrace" of the Carnival.[23] When the Carnival is officially over at 6 p.m.,[24] usually not even a third of the bands and floats has reached the reviewing stand. This official end of the Carnival procession is enforced by a martially looking police phalanx marching down Eastern Parkway. The bands and revelers withdraw into the side streets (not without little skirmishes with the police), where the Carnival continues until late in the night.

Politically, the Brooklyn Carnival has been used for voter registration and naturalization drives and to draw attention to the West Indian community as political clientèle. Moreover, local West Indian (and other New

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[23]A typical headline about the Carnival in *the West Indian* press reads: "Brooklyn's Caribbean Carnival: As Usual, A Disgrace" (*Everybody's*, October 1980, p. 34).

[24]This early end has been a result of Carnival "disturbances" in the past. Before 1979, Carnival lasted officially until 11 p.m.

York) politicians have tried to establish themselves as mediators of the West Indian community as an ethnic minority – in a way following the New York tradition of white ethnic political mobilization. However, the 'anarchic' nature of the Brooklyn Carnival and its general mocking of hierarchies and authorities "tends to undermine both its own organizers and the political officials from whom recognition is sought".[25] Instead of creating ethnic political leaders, the West Indian Carnival in Brooklyn symbolizes and asserts a Pan-West Indian and Afro-Caribbean identity and collectivity at 'the grass- roots'.

Like other cultural events, Carnival is a highly contested terrain, determined by different interests and social forces. According to the anthropologist Abner Cohen, Carnival generates a "potentiality for political articulation, serving in some situations as 'rituals of rebellion', whose function is cathartic and is ultimately a mechanism helping in the maintenance of the established order; and in other situations as expressions of resistance, protest, and violence."[26] At the same time, this dialectical character of Carnival is hidden by its formal definition and by popular ideas about it: Carnival is regarded as a festival characterized by reveling, playfulness, and overindulgence in eating, drinking, and sex, culminating in massive street processions by individual and bands of masqueraders, playing and dancing ecstatically to the accompaniment of loud and cheerful music. Carnival's special attraction is that it allows for temporary release from the constraints of the social order enabling relationships even among strangers as well as usually forbidden excesses. In short, Carnival stands for sensuousness, freedom, merrymaking, expressivity, frivolity, and amity, even if it is only for a limited time period.[27]

The concrete historical reality of Carnival, of course, is more complex – and contradictory. Through most of its history, Carnival has been a period of ritualized role reversal and "lampooning liberty"[28] for the lower classes. In Trinidad, where it was brought by French colonialists but, after Emancipation, appropriated and transformed by the freed slaves to preserve African traditions and to oppose the ruling classes, Carnival developed into a "symbol of freedom for the broad mass of the population".[29] Carnival has to be understood as an instable and precarious balance of compromise between contradictory forces and potentialities, between consensus and conflict, control and spontaneity, compliance and subversion. Both elements are present in Carnival, at one and the same time as well as

[25]KASINITZ/FREIDENBERG-HERBSTEIN 1987:343.
[26]COHEN 1982:24.
[27]*Ibid.*, p. 34.
[28]Victor TURNER 1983:190.
[29]HILL 1972:24; see also WÜST 1987.

within an (ambiguous) unity of form. If Carnival's precarious balance is seriously disturbed by swinging to either side of the contradictory ambiguity – turning, for example, into an affirmative political rally of the type staged under totalitarian systems or, more likely, by expressing explicit militant political opposition to the existing social and political order –, the nature of Carnival "is changed and [...] ceases to be a Carnival".[30]

In the case of the Brooklyn Carnival, both the "chaos" and the appearance of concentrated police power point to its potentially explosive character. As particularly the "riots" during the West Indian Carnival in London in the past have shown,[31] Carnival can be an accurate gauge of social deprivation as well as of potential for resistance by the immigrants in the 'host society'. Because West Indians' traditional suspicion of authority,[32] which has carried over into (the "chaos" of) Carnival, tends to undermine organized political mobilization, the "ritualized resistance"[33] to the social order, playfully displayed during Carnival celebration, bears the potential of turning into a rather non-ritualized, anarchist rebellion.

> At present, Carnival in Brooklyn is a huge party where guests indulge themselves with food, liquor, music, and camaraderie. But, in light of its history, Carnival's spectacle must be regarded as potential rebellion, the other face of communitas.[34]

While the Brooklyn Carnival symbolizes, on the one hand, the emergent ethnic-collective identity of the Afro-Caribbean community in New York City, it has exposed, on the other, the West Indian community's ambivalent relationship to U.S. Afro-Americans. Despite frequent emphasis on the necessity of Black unity and reference to the common history of slavery and racism of all Afro-Americans in the "New World", the immigration experience and Caribbean life in New York City has generated a form of collective identity which is defined in ethnic terms – in a way following the New York (and American) tradition of ethnic politics. This does not only imply a cultural distinction between Caribbean and U.S. Afro-Americans; it tends to contribute to their political division.[35] At the same time, West Indians have been regarded by white America, without distinction, as part of the Black community – defined on the basis

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[30]COHEN 1982:37.

[31]Cf. Abner COHEN 1980; Everton PRYCE 1985.

[32]This suspicion of (political) authorities and those in power, which is widespread among Caribbean people, has been generated by historical experience: the violent history of colonialism, slavery, and neocolonial dependency in the Caribbean.

[33]Angelita REYES, p.108.

[34]Donald HILL/Robert ABRAMSON 1979:85.

[35]Cf. KASINITZ 1988, chap. 8; GREEN/WILSON.

of racial classification, not ethnic and cultural affiliation.[36] Moreover, Caribbean and U.S. Afro-Americans are both exposed to racism and discrimination, social and political marginalization, which has considerably limited their options in American society. In fact, West Indian incorporation into Black America has been the only viable path to political and economic success in the past.[37] Therefore, it is not surprising that West Indians have remained ambiguous about their relationship with Black U.S.-Americans avoiding open dissociation from them. Instead, West Indian identity has been defined in cultural rather than explicitly political terms. Such a 'depoliticization' of collective West Indian identity has made possible the continuation of the ambivalent and contradictory relationship toward 'native' Afro-America allowing for both dissociation and solidarity depending on the concrete situation.

At the same time, the model of a Pan-West Indian identity has been challenged from within the Afro-Caribbean community. Younger West Indians, influenced by Rastafari, prefer a Pan-African model of identity which includes all peoples of African descent. Although this version of Pan-Africanism is internationalist in content and tends to address all Afro-Americans in the New World, it has done so in particular – i.e. Jamaican – form and on its own (more or less) restrictive terms.[38]

The new Afro-Caribbean immigrants have come to New York City, bringing with them a consciousness not of being "Black" but of their specific (insular) Caribbean origin. In New York City, this national or insular self-definition has been transformed into a comprehensive Afro-Caribbean identity and culture. Similar to their European predecessors, West Indian immigrants have developed an *ethnic* consciousness, although they have been less inclined toward assimilation. Because of American racism, most of them have kept alive the wish to return home, even if it has proved difficult to realize. In fact, the conservation of this dream to return home has become in itself a vehicle and expression of the immigrants' holding on to their West Indian ethnic identity. Moreover, the geographical closeness between the Caribbean and New York City has allowed for continuous 'commuting' of people, material resources, culture, lifestyles, and ideas to and from New York City contributing to the preservation of strong familial and cultural links to the Caribbean. At the same time, life in New York City has confronted Afro-Caribbean immigrants

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[36]See Remco van CAPELLEVEEN 1988:82-84. As a result of this racial classification by white America, the Afro-Caribbean immigrant has suffered a "double invisibility [...] as *blacks* and as *black foreigners*" (Roy BRYCE-LAPORTE 1972:31; see also Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man,* New York 1952).

[37]See Calvin HOLDER 1980.

[38]KASINITZ/FREIDENBERG-HERBSTEIN 1987:345.

with a racially divided society exposing them not only to racist discrimination but, worse, indiscriminately placing them behind a rigid "color line". While in the Caribbean shades of complexion matter and, for those who have it, money "whitens", in the United States Afro-Caribbeans are simply non-white and thus can never become part of the white *"Herrenvolk"* society.[39] The Afro-Caribbean response to this situation has been ambivalent. On the one hand, they have tried to avoid the 'inferior' status of U.S. American Blacks by insisting on their difference and stressing their "West Indianness". On the other, experience of widespread racism towards all people of color has generated an understanding of a common "Black fate" which might develop into a Pan African onsciousness. Such a comprehensive "Black consciousness", which tends to play down the differences between U.S. and Caribbean Afro-Americans, has particularly been expressed vis-à-vis white America.[40] Whatever forms of Black conciousness will come forth in the future, for the time being we do witness the "Caribbeanization" of New York City developing the increasing Afro-Caribbean community into an emerging cultural (and political) force that has already left its distinct marks on the city.

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[39]Van den Berghe has used the term "Herrenvolk democracy" for racially divided societies and "regimes such as those of the United States or South Africa that are democratic for the master race but tyrannical for the subordinate groups" (Pierre van den BERGHE 1967:18). The 'abolition' of Jim Crow and the passing of the Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s did not eliminate 'white supremacy' and racism in the United States (see footnote 12).

[40]Constance SUTTON/Susan MAKIESKY 1987:104-105.

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